Fairbury's Interesting 100 Year History Revealed

April 3, 1958
Fairbury Blade Newspaper

First Presbyterian Church looked like this around 1920.

Presbyterian History Began Here In 1858

History of Presbyterian church—
(Taken from 50th Anniversary,
April 4, 1920)

(Mrs. A. H. Remington)

The First Presbyterian Church of Fairbury, Illinois, was the result of the union of Old and New School Presbyterian Churches which took place in 1870. The New School church was organized in 1858, Rev. I. T. Whittemore being the first Pastor. The congregation worshiped in a Hall over a store until 1862, when they built a church on the ground where the present edifice stands.

The Church prospered and its membership and usefulness increased until 1867, when some of the members who had been "Old School" decided to organize a church and worship by themselves. Under the leadership of Rev. John Dale as Pastor, they built a small church where the Amish Church now stands. In 1870, when the Old and New School Presbyterians united throughout the world, the two Fairbury Churches came together. They worshiped for a short time in the old school church with Rev. M. B. Gregg, the New School Pastor in charge. The congregation increasing, they removed to the New School building. The Sabbath School had been in existence since 1858, and the Ladies Auxiliary Society organized in the early Sixties was very active and helpful.

Mr. Gregg's pastorate ended in March, 1871, and in October of the same year Rev. J. N. Hutchinson accepted a call from the church and remained with it until December, 1874. The Lord blessed the work and the people felt the need of a new and larger Church Building. The Auxiliary Society had $300 in its treasury which the ladies hoped to use for that purpose but it was finally decided to defer building for a time.

After Mr. Hutchinson left, the pulpit was occupied by Rev. Mr. Hutchins for a short time. He with his mother and sister occupying the Parsonage, the house now owned by Mr. Davenport.

With the advent of Rev. John Allison in June 1881, the Church became encouraged on the subject of building. Being an eloquent speaker and having traveled extensively, Mr. Allison gave a course of Lectures for the building fund and a subscription paper was soon started for a new church edifice. The organization still owned the Old School church building and that and the New School parsonage were sold and the proceeds applied toward the new church, which was dedicated free from all indebtedness in 1882.

Rev. Robert Watt succeeded Mr. Allison. He was young and enthusiastic and did a good work here.

Rev. D. L. Temple came in 1886. He divided his time the first year between Fairbury and Chenoa, preaching at each place once on the Sabbath. Later he gave his whole time to the Fairbury Church. The

membership increase was considerable during Mr. Temple's ministration which ended in April 1890.

Rev. R. A. Vanderlas was Mr. Temple's successor, being with the church from April, 1891, to August, 1892.

Rev. S. F. Sharpless became Pastor of the Church in November 1892. The following year the present Manse was built, the church grounds being large enough to accommodate a second building.

Mr. Sharpless left in August, 1895, and when the present Pastor, Rev. Charles S. Davies, came in May, 1896, the church had become quite weak from various causes primarily, because several very helpful families had removed to other towns and some members had died. While frequently there was no preaching on the Sabbath, the midweek service and the Sabbath School were carried on without intermission and the Lord's good promises never failed.

Under the new Pastor's direction everything began to improve. The Woman's Missionary Society was a very feeble organization at that time. As it grew stronger the Pastor advised that it become the "Church Missionary Society" thereby including men as well as women. This has proven to be an excellent idea and the society has become strong and helpful. The Church building was enlarged in 1901, by the addition of a Sunday School room which was greatly needed. The Basement too has been improved at different times and conveniences added. It now furnishes rooms for the Primary classes of the Sabbath School, and is also well equipped for the use of the Auxiliary Society in holding meetings, serving suppers, etc., which they believe promote Christian fellowship among the members of the Church and congregation.

A pipe organ was later added to the Church equipment, which has been of almost inestimable value during the years that have followed through aid to a ministry of melody and song.

The Church has received bequests of money from the Estates of former members which have greatly assisted in its works of benevolence. Only the interest is used, the principal being invested. The John and Helen Cockram Fund amounts to $16,000. A memorial tablet with the following inscription is placed in the Church: "In Memoriam" "1836 John Cockram 1905" "1832 Helen Cockram 1911"

"When called to their reward they bequeathed to the Presbyterian Church in Fairbury, the John and Helen Cockram Fund, directing that the income be used for the work of Christ's Kingdom on Earth. The Trustees and congregation have accepted the trust and declare it their purpose to expend such amount as seems fit to encourage a more intimate knowledge of the Gospel of Jesus Christ in the community. To spend the remainder with other contributions in maintaining an assistant Pastor on the foreign field. Hebrews 6-1"

The Mary A. George Fund of $1,000 was given by a former earnest member of the church, for the general uses of the Church. The Lester King Fund is a like amount of $1,000. As a soldier he gave his life on the battlefield of France and his parents presented the gift as a memorial to him, the income to

be used to assist the work of the young people of the congregation.

In 1912 the Church assumed the support of Rev. A. V. Gray in Nanking, China, and through his efforts and those of his wife our people have sought to fulfill the admonition to carry the Gospel to the uttermost parts of the world.

This congregation always responded generously to all appeals for extension of the church work. Many Christian workers both at home and abroad owe their education and training to funds contributed by us. Scholarships are maintained for both young men and young women among the Freedmen. For many years the Church sustained a flourishing Christian Endeavor, both Senior and Junior Societies. The former has been merged into a Young People's Federation which is active in all good works. Steady Streams, the Children's Society, educates the little ones along missionary lines.

It would be impossible to emphasize too greatly the strength afforded the Church by the Ladies Aid Society and the Sabbath School. Their faithful co-operation has never failed. There are a number of organized classes in the Sabbath School whose efforts have resulted in large contributions to missions and to charitable work at home.

The membership in 1870 was 88. It is now 350. Those familiar with the history of this Church know that there have been times of perplexity, and almost anxiety, but never times of doubt or discouragement. They believe that discouragement in the Lord's work is inexcusable. Sometimes an important place has been left vacant by the removal of a faithful worker, sometimes a financial problem has arisen but some one has always come forward to fill that place and the way was opened to meet financial needs. The Church has found that "The Lord is Mindful of His People."

Since the history of the first fifty years of the First Presbyterian Church has been written the following item has been brought to light. The inscription on the bell in the church is as follows:

First Presbyterian Church
October 1, 1883
Rev. Robert Watt, pastor
Trustees, W. H. Taylor, William Blain, John Decker

Glory to God in the Highest

Although the new church was dedicated free from all indebtedness in 1882 the bell was probably bought and installed as the inscription states on October 1, 1883.

The William Blain whose name appears on the bell was the grandfather of Wm. Fugate of our city.

Rev. Charles S. Davies came to our church in May 1896. May 22, 1932 was the 50th anniversary of dedication of the edifice of the church and also the 36th pastorate anniversary of Rev. Davies. He

closed his pastorate August, 1941, after 45 years of splendid and unfailing service not only to his church but in the community. (This is the longest pastorate in the history of Bloomington Presbytery) His fine principles and Christian example will ever be a guide to those who were fortunate enough to have had him as their pastor. After leaving here he made his residence in Vineland, New Jersey, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and in the summer of 1948 returned to Fairbury to make his home. Dr. Davies passed away Jan. 21, 1956.

On October 6, 1941 at 7:30 p. m. the Rev. Willard Heimbeck was installed as the new pastor. During Rev. Heimbeck's pastorate he was united in marriage to Miss Elizabeth Montgomery from Rock Island, Ill.

On September 6, 1942 the Presbyterian church had a Homecoming; every member whose name appeared on the records and address was available was invited. A beautiful morning service followed by a splendid dinner which was followed by a short service honoring our service men and closing with Holy Communion brought the memorable day to a close.

Rev. Heimbeck made many friends while here. His pastorate ended in May 1945. From here he went to a Napoleon, Ohio, church.

Rev. William Pritchard, Jr. was installed on September 23, 1945, as the pastor of the Presbyterian church. Rev. and Mrs. Pritchard and son came to the church from Sheldon, Illinois. While here William III and Mark came to bless their home.

While Rev. Pritchard was here, the church was again improved by the addition of several church school rooms to the northeast section of the main building. This met an important need because of the growing membership.

The Women's Auxiliary and Missionary society were formed into the Presbyterian Women's organization with five circles.

The Presbyterian Women's organization is doing a splendid work with far-reaching effect.

During Rev. Pritchard's ministry the church sponsored a family from Austria, Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Gaug and Sylvia and Gabor. They came in February 1951, and went to Oshkosh, Wis. July 15, 1956.

The church was renewed again in a material way in the summer of 1951. The organ was changed and the chancel was rearranged and new accessories installed. With the new equipment a more formal arrangement was established and on Sunday December 2, 1951, a very impressive dedication service was observed.

The Charles Robinson Memorial Chancel—Presented by Mrs. Lucy Carmon.

The Pulpit—Presented by Mr. and Mrs. Karl Keck and Mrs. Estella K. Platt in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Keck.

The Bible—Presented by the Choir and Friends in memory of Mrs. Aline Remington Heckman.

The Baptismal Font—presented by Charles H. Purdum and Glenn Gibb Families in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Charles A. Purdum.

The Cross, Candlesticks and vases—presented by Mr. and Mrs. Walter Decker in memory of Pfc. Robert W. Decker.

The Offering Plates—presented by Mrs. Kate Huntoon in memory of Hugh Moss Sutton.

The Communion Table—presented by Ruth B. Taylor in memory of Mrs. Chloe B. Bartlett.

The Reredos—presented by Mrs. Marie R. Seifert in memory of Arthur Seifert.

The Chancel Lights—presented by John and Charles Huette, Mrs. Helen Bates, Stanley Dennewitz in memory of Mrs. Addie Huette.

The congregation of the church were deeply appreciative of the work of the board of trustees who so ably planned the new chancel.

The new furnishings were beautiful and helped put dignity in the service, although one realizes the greatest beauty is the desire to ever be a witness for Our Heavenly Father and the teachings of our Saviour.

Rev. Pritchard's pastorate ended in February 1952 when he went to The First Presbyterian church of Indianapolis, Indiana, as the Associate Pastor.

On June 1, 1952, Rev. John Foss was installed and he and Mrs. Foss were here until February 1957.

While here little daughter Karen came to brighten their home.

Rev. Foss was a man of great sincerity and made many friends while here and the church prospered. He was very civic minded and helped in many projects. The Go-See-Trip was of great interest to the young people. This project was of such interest that the Presbytery, seeing the result, sponsored a trip for the Presbytery. He was especially interested in youth activities. While here he was instrumental in developing the Hummel Woods Camp site on Lake Bloomington which Mrs. Hummel donated to the Bloomington Presbytery of Illinois. The Presbyterian laymen's breakfasts during Holy Week to which men of other churches as probably were also invited became so popular that a prayer group of interested laymen was organized which meets weekly.

In 1957 the church sponsored a family from Germany Mr. and Mrs. Gebhardt Heppner and daughter. Mr. Heppner is employed as a mason. They have united with the church and have taken their place in the community.

Rev. and Mrs. Foss and Karen left Fairbury in February, 1957, to make their home in St. Louis Park, Minnesota to organize and develop a new church.

On May 11, 1957 Rev. and Mrs. Richard L. Harrison came to Fairbury, Illinois. Rev. Harrison was installed as minister of the church on May 26, 1957.

On June 18, 1957 their son Mark came to bring happiness to their home. Rev. Harrison has made many friends in the short time he has been here and is doing his work in an able manner.

The First Presbyterian Church of Fairbury has continued through the years to show its interest in the world-wide work of the church, by supporting missionaries and fraternal workers at home and abroad.

This active service began with the support of Rev. A. V. Gray in Nanking, China in 1912. Rev. Gray was an instructor in the Nanking University. He made itinerating trips through the country and contracted an oriental disease which forced his retirement. When he and his wife returned to the States, they were met in Seattle by Dr. and Mrs. Otis who had been notified by Dr. Davies of their arrival. Dr. and Mrs. Otis cared for them until the Board arranged for them to go East where Rev. Gray was treated and cured but was very frail. He was pastor of a small church in Iowa and there passed away.

After the death of Rev. Gray, Dr. L. K. Anderson became our representative in 1926, as an evangelistic missionary in Cameroun, West Africa. In 1939 Dr. Anderson was made secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions for Africa and Latin America. He was appointed Field Representative for Africa in 1950, with headquarters in Yaounde. It is thrilling to know that the Presbyterian church has advanced in the Cameroun, until it has its own General Assembly and in 1957 became a completely indigenous church.

Following Dr. Anderson in 193^ the church congregation began the support of Rev. S. Irvine Graham in Ponte Nova, Brazil, where he and his wife were teachers in the Normal school. Mr. Graham also supervised the school farm. Later, the Grahams were transferred to Jatai, in the state of Goiaz, Brazil. Soon after the transfer Mr. Graham lost his life in an airplane accident in Goiaz. His wife, Ruth Graham is at present supervisor of teachers in the Samuel Graham Institute, so named in honor of her husband.

In 1953 the church assumed the partial support of Rev. Aulden D. Coble in Ibaque, Colombia, S. A. Ibaque has for some time been the most open field for the gospel in the country, but recently the centers have been closed to Protestants. At present Rev. and Mrs. Coble are on loan to the West central area of the Board of Foreign Missions in the U. S. A. Rev. Coble is West Central area secretary with his office in Kansas City.

Dr. Donald P. Davis became the church's representative as a fraternal worker in India, December 11, 1956. He spent some time at Landour, in the foothills of the Himalayas, studying the language and preparing for active service meanwhile working in the Landour hospital. He is to be located at the Memorial Hospital in Fatehgarh, India.

During the ministry of Rev. John Foss, the church undertook the partial support of their first missionary under the Board of National Missions. Rev. Lowell M. Campbell was a class-mate of Rev. John Foss and Rev. Richard Harrison. He was the missionary pastor at the Eskimo village of Gambell, St. Lawrence Is., Alaska. He was transferred to the church in Anchorage which had become self-supporting in 1956.

In 1957, the Rev. Arthur E. French III began service as pastor of the Church in Gambell, St. Lawrence Is. He also serves as moderator of the Savoonga church, sixty-five dog-team miles away. He is the present representative of the Fairbury Presbyterian Church under the Board of National Missions.

The information and inspiration brought to the church by these ambassadors of Christ at home and abroad, have broadened the vision and increased the interest of the church congregation in missions. They have also fulfilled a triple need; the need of the home church to obey the command of Christ to go into all the world and preach the gospel, the need of the world to know the love of God through Christ and the need of the Heavenly Father to be glorified in the earth.

BEQUESTS AND GIFTS

In all endeavors, spiritual or otherwise, the church needs financial assistance and help in various ways. These combined bring the church closer to the objective.

Through the years bequests and gifts have stimulated the work and have made it possible to carry on. The following have been greatly appreciated: A bequest from Catherine Nimmo estate of $2,000; from Mr. Kayton Readle, $100; Mr. and Mrs. Will Nimmo, chimes; Mrs. Mary Nimmo estate, $5,000; and Mrs. Ida Shanks estate, $10,000; Mrs. Mary Harvey, Bible bookmarks and pulpit scarves, Mrs. Anna Householder, Pulpit and lectern lights. And so their interest in the church and their love for His house are manifested although they have entered into His Kingdom.

New Hymnals were placed in the church in memory of Mr. and Mrs. Charles W. Keck by Dr. C. S. Davies, Perry J. Keck, Estella K. Platt, and Karl V. Keck in 1938. A desk lamp given in memory of Dr. W. A. Roth was presented by Mrs. Roth and William Roth.

When hymnals were needed again in December, 1955, Mr. and Mrs. Karl V. Keck presented the church with the new hymnals.

A picture with a religious theme was presented to the Sabbath school in memory of Catherine Phelps

by her parents, Mr. and Mrs. A. G. Phelps.

These gestures of interest and helpfulness are appreciated by the members and congregation.

Most inspiring sermons accompanied by beautiful music excellently rendered have made the church an inviting house in which to worship.

There have been many organized groups within the church that have given great strength in many ways to sustain the spiritual life of the church.

The continuous and conscientious endeavor of faithful workers in various duties through the years cannot be over-emphasized.

The untiring and sincere efforts in these various directions are prompted by a love for “Him Who changeth not”. Although changes have occurred, faithful ones have come forward. It is strong individuals who make strong groups and able leaders and faithful followers have made the church one of strength.

The church is one of earnest Christian desires and accomplishments and much is due to the faith and spirit of its members combined with a strong leadership. The membership has grown from 350 in 1920 to 413 in 1957. Not only has membership increased but also a fine Christian fellowship has developed.

Dependent upon the Lord for strength and guidance, the First Presbyterian church looks forward to the next 100 years expectantly.

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May 18, 2026